



Human Rights Go Local: What Works

Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels

"Accountability in Action: Human Rights Action Plans of Local Governments"

5 – 8 February 2024

Concept Note

(version: 19 September 2023)

1. Background

The International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels under the auspices of UNESCO and the UNESCO Chair in Human Rights and Human Security in Graz, Austria, together with the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), UN-Habitat, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the African Local Governments Academy (UCLG-Africa), the Austrian Federal Ministry of European and International Affairs, the Federal Province of Styria, the City of Graz, and the University of Graz¹ organise the fourth edition of the annual Academy and Conference “Human Rights Go Local: What Works”. The event contributes to the United Nations’ vision of protecting and promoting human rights for all by informing local governments on how to deliver on their related obligations, as well as to the goals set by the 2030 Agenda, and its promise to “Leave No One Behind”.

The Academy and Conference series demonstrates innovative approaches and proven practices for protecting and promoting human rights at the local level, making cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable. It ultimately seeks to improve the quality of life of all people living in urban settings around the globe. With this event series, the International Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels fulfils its mandate to build bridges between all institutions, organisations, initiatives, engagements, efforts, and ideas that focus on local and regional human rights practices, to moderate their exchange and to facilitate the implementation of human rights at the local level.

Topical human rights issues, the Sustainable Development Goals, the New Urban Agenda, and the current volume of the [“Human Rights Go Local” publication series](#) are the basis for the selection of the thematic focus of the annual event. In 2021, the first Academy and Conference brought together 40 human rights experts from local governments, international and regional organisations, and the research community to discuss field-proven methods to generate reliable human rights data for evidence-based policy-making at the local level. All practices, findings, and proposals of this event were synthesised in the Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks on [“Building Bridges between Local Governments and the Scientific Community to Promote Human](#)

¹ Co-organisation by partners still to be confirmed.



[Rights](#)“, which was presented by the co-organisers to 200 international guests at the Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels held on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the city of Graz (Austria) as Europe’s first Human Rights City.

The second Academy and Conference, held in 2022, built on these results and focused on successful strategies and initiatives for strengthening local authorities’ commitments to human rights. Valuable insights and experiences concerning the drivers and actors of local human rights commitments, the local development of commitments, and the steps that could be taken in the future were collected by 70 participants in the Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks entitled [“From Intentions to Commitments: Towards the Effective and Sustainable Implementation of Human Rights”](#) and presented to 400 conference guests from 55 countries.

The 2023 Academy and Conference focussed on experiences made and lessons learnt in governing the city by human rights objectives. 62 participants discussed the potential for change related to the integration of human rights into the management, administrative and policy processes of local governments. The Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks on [“Governing the City by Human Rights Objectives: Management Concepts and Instruments”](#) summarises the results of this event and contains 12 concrete Encouragements for action for local authorities, which the Mayor of the City of Graz presented to the 386 participants of the Conference broadcasted from Graz City Hall.

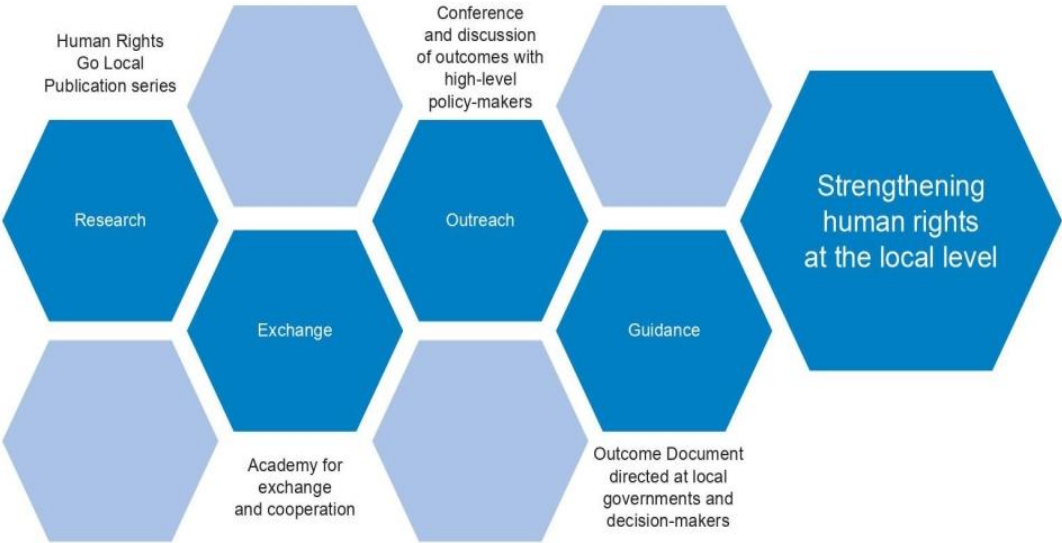


Figure: The cycle of the Human Rights Go Local series including publication, Academy, Conference, and Outcome Document

2. Rationale

The discussions at these previous events have shown that local authorities have already achieved a lot on the way to implementing their human rights obligations. Notwithstanding this progress, it was also clear from the contributions of many participants that much remains to be done to strengthen the accountability of local governments. While there are many ways to do this, we



decided to concentrate on human rights action plans as an instrument for promoting accountability at the 4th edition of the “Human Rights Go Local: What Works” Academy. By action plans we mean strategic documents that set out the specific objectives and actions to promote and protect human rights at the local level, which are designed to address the specific challenges and needs of the local population while being aligned with national and international human rights standards.

The reasons for choosing this theme are manifold. Action plans are a very topical issue, as they are currently widely used at local, regional, national and international levels. Local governments around the world already have substantial experience with this instrument and can therefore share their wealth of knowledge in this regard. Action plans are also a globally applicable instrument that can nevertheless be discussed independently of the specific normative framework that applies to the local government in question. Last but not least, action plans, by their very conception, are best suited to promote accountability of local governments, as they are a tool that local governments address to themselves.

For these reasons, the Academy and Conference 2024 provides an online platform for sharing human rights action plans, discussing relevant experiences and collecting and disseminating approaches that have proven successful among local governments. By discussing the practical aspects of successfully adopting and implementing human rights action plans, the Academy aims to help local governments promote accountability effectively and efficiently. Some of the main topics discussed in the Academy's plenary sessions and workshops are:

- **Stocktaking:** To what extent have human rights action plans proven helpful for local governments to promote human rights? What are the possibilities but also the limitations of human rights action plans when it comes to promoting accountability of local governments? What is the importance of multi-level governance in this context and what has been the experience of local authorities around the world in aligning local action plans with national and international human rights action plans?
- **Lessons from the field:** How can human rights action plans actually make a difference at the local level? What are the key factors (e.g., participatory planning, budget anchoring, monitoring, multi-level governance, etc.) that help local governments to promote accountability through action plans? What lessons have been learned so far and can be shared? How can existing practices best be transferred to other local contexts?
- **Needs and potentials:** What is needed to embed effective human rights action plans in local government systems worldwide? What steps need to be taken next so that action plans can be better used to promote accountability of local governments?

The theme of the 2024 Academy and the Conference was chosen with the conviction that human rights action plans can not only be of great practical value to local governments in fulfilling their human rights obligations and commitments, but in particular are an effective tool to promote their accountability.

The Academy will provide an opportunity to exchange and disseminate best practice approaches followed by local governments in developing and implementing human rights action plans. Plenary sessions and workshops will bring together human rights experts and practitioners from the local, regional, national and international levels to discuss challenges, solutions and best practices. The Outcome Document as a tangible result of the Academy will be discussed with high-level policy makers at the Conference on 8 February 2024.



3. Overall goal

The 2024 edition of the Academy and Conference “Human Rights Go Local: What Works” aims to build bridges between different levels of government, academic disciplines and regions. It also seeks to promote exchanges between local level authorities, policy makers and human rights experts and practitioners from all regions. Special attention will be given to the participation of the next generation of human rights experts, who will have the opportunity to share experiences and network with experts.

The specific objective of the 2024 Academy is to gather and discuss practice-relevant insights on human rights action plans as a tool to promote accountability for human rights of local governments. The plenary sessions and workshops will take an in-depth look at what approaches work in this regard and what challenges and solutions exist. The aim of the Academy is to facilitate the implementation of human rights by making the insights and suggestions gathered during the Academy directly accessible to local authorities.

The specific objective of the 2024 conference is to provide a broader audience of local governments with condensed knowledge on the potential of human rights action plans at the local level, to make concrete proposals on how to develop and implement such plans building on a multi-level governance approach, and to adopt an Outcome Document outlining possible ways forward.

4. Target groups

The aim of the International Centre and the UNESCO Chair in Graz is to provide an easily accessible platform for knowledge, exchange and collaboration for all those working with or within local governments at all levels and in all functions who wish to explore the potential of human rights action plans as a tool to promote local government accountability.

The prime target groups are representatives of local governments (policy-making, public administration), city networks and intermediaries, such as human rights professionals and practitioners working in all relevant areas (think tanks, academia, civil society, and international or regional organisations). The event further targets professionals and practitioners interested in gaining expertise on the subject, and explicitly includes members of the next generation wishing to professionalise in human rights at the local and regional levels.

5. Broader objectives

1. Exchange experiences on human rights action plans between local authorities, think tanks, human rights institutions, academics, civil society organisations and regional and international organisations.
2. Take stock of and improve the visibility of those local human rights action plans around the world that effectively promote the accountability of local governments.
3. Improve the understanding of local human rights action plans and communicate to local and regional authorities how action plans can be successfully placed in the context of their sphere of influence.
4. Encourage local governments to adopt a human rights action plan with the aim of promoting their human rights accountability.
5. Expand the existing network for the exchange of experiences and develop further solid working relationships and collaborations for the future.
6. Harness the aspirations, perspectives and expertise of the next generation with regard to human rights action plans.



7. Develop and adopt an Outcome Document and discuss its content with high-level local authorities and policy makers.

6. Outcomes

1. Participants will have gained knowledge of practice-proven human rights action plans as a tool to promote accountability.
2. The target group will have learned about different existing human rights action plans.
3. Local governments will have been informed about concrete ways to promote accountability through human rights action plans.
4. International, regional and local actors will have matched their perspectives on the further development of action plans for strengthening accountability for human rights.
5. Participants active at the local level will have benefitted from an exchange with peers and networks promoting human rights action plans, such as the United Cities and Local Governments and the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities, and will have been encouraged to solid working relations bilaterally with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, the African Local Governments Academy, the United Cities and Local Governments or one of the regional organisations of the International Coalition of Inclusive and Sustainable Cities.
6. Next generation human rights experts will have contributed their aspirations, perspectives and expertise on human rights action plans.
7. The results of the Academy will have been fed into the Conference in the form of an Outcome Document on human rights action plans as a tool to promote accountability of local governments.

7. Cooperation partners²

The 2024 edition of the Academy and Conference is organised in collaboration with UNESCO, UN-Habitat, the OHCHR, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, the African Local Governments Academy, the Austrian Federal Ministry for European and International Affairs, the Provincial Government Styria, the City of Graz, and the University of Graz.

8. Human Rights Go Local readings

Building Bridges between Local Governments and the Scientific Community to Promote Human Rights” [Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks 2021](#) of Human Rights Go Local: What Works - Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels 2021 on Field-proven Research Methods on Human Rights, 1-9 February 2021, Graz, 9 February 2021.

From Intentions to Commitments: Towards the Effective and Sustainable Implementation of Human Rights, [Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks 2022](#) of Human Rights Go Local: What Works - Academy and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels 2022, 1-8 February 2022, Graz, 8 February 2022.

Governing the city by human rights objectives: Management concepts and instruments, [Outcome Document and Explanatory Remarks 2023](#) of Human Rights Go Local: What Works – Academy

² Co-organisation by partners still to be confirmed.



and Conference on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, 1-8 February 2023, Graz, 7 February 2023.

Karina Gomes and Markus Möstl, [Implementing Human Rights and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the Local Level: Key Issues and Examples](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publications Series, Volume 1, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2020.

Isabella Meier, [Research on Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels: Methods, Practices, Approaches](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 2, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2021.

Jasmien Deklerck, [From Commitment to Responsibility for Human Rights in Cities and Regions](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), [Human Rights Go Local Publication Series](#), Volume 3, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2022.

UNESCO Centre for the Promotion of Human Rights at the Local and Regional Levels, [Governing the City by Human Rights Objectives: Embedding Human Rights in Public Management Instruments](#), in: Gerd Oberleitner and Klaus Starl (series eds.), Human Rights Go Local Publication Series, Volume 4, HRGL Publishing, Graz, 2023.

To get the latest news about the 2024 Academy and Conference, visit the [WEBSITE](#) where you can also subscribe to regular updates.

